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Consuming authenticity: pleasure, benefit and harm in 'transactional intimacy' and 'slum tourism'

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Abstract (148 words)

This paper uses Bernstein's concept of 'bounded authenticity' (2007) to explore the benefits, pleasures and harms of seeking to consume managed 'authentic' experiences. This work brings together the respective interests of the authors, in sex work and tourism, by focusing on two case studies: (1) transactional intimacy and (2) slum tourism. We situate our discussion in the context of Raymen's 2018 paper, which explores how both liberal individualism and the absence of a unified normative framework have impeded a collective definition of 'social harm' and 'the good'.

Our analysis of both practices of transactional intimacy and slum tourism indicate that the benefits accrue mainly to the consumer. From a liberal individualist and economic perspective, those involved in selling authenticity may also be empowered financially and personally. However, we argue that consuming authenticity too often relies on, and reproduces, existing inequalities, either within the transaction space or by displacement.

Key words:

consumption; bounded authenticity; transactional intimacy; slum tourism; harm

Consuming authenticity: pleasure, benefit and harm in 'transactional intimacy' and 'slum tourism'

Introduction

This paper uses Bernstein's concept of 'bounded authenticity' (2007) to explore the benefits, pleasures and harms of seeking to consume managed 'authentic' experiences. This work brings together the respective interests of the authors, in sex work and tourism, by focusing on two case studies: (1) transactional intimacy and (2) slum tourism. We have tried deliberately here to offer a more even-handed discussion, by acknowledging also the pleasures and benefits involved in these social practices, and to recognise and grapple with the disputed nature of 'social harm' (and indeed the notion of the 'authentic'). To do this, we situate our analysis in the context of Raymen's 2018 paper, which explores how both liberal individualism and the absence of a unified normative framework have impeded a collective definition of 'social harm' and 'the good'. In particular, we consider Raymen's claim that the pursuit of external goods for private benefit can tend to corrode their internal value and that our evaluation of 'the good' (and by implication 'the harmful') is the extent to which practices advance human flourishing (this latter argument is taken from Pemberton, 2015).

Following a review of the literature on consumption, authenticity and social harm, each author intoduces the context of their case study, before considering the pleasures, benefits and harms of each practice. In the final section, we consider the points of connection between the case studies and return to Raymen (2018) to assess the consequences of consuming bounded authenticity.

Literature review: consumption, authenticity and harm

Outlining a history of consumerism, Zygmunt Bauman claims that the hallmark of contemporary consumption is its "emancipation… from past instrumentality that used to draw its limits" (2001, p.12). He argues that while 'desire' superseded nineteenth century preoccupations with 'need', desires have in turn been replaced by 'wishes', representing a triumph of the pleasure principle over the more stoic and mundane concern with 'reality' and 'functionality' (pp.13-14). In short, pleasure and never-quite-reached gratification are key drivers of contemporary consumption.

Concern for 'authenticity' has emerged both alongside and in reaction to the mass production and standardisation processes of the post-Ford era (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). The magic of capitalism is that it can conjure both banal and bespoke. First, to satisfy the consumer looking for authenticity, goods are designed "to appear as if they reflect a state prior to commodification" (op cit., p.446). This applies to both case studies discussed in this paper: sex workers may offer intimacy, companionship and the 'girlfriend experience' (GFE) to buyers looking for more than half an hour in a hotel room. Similarly, tourist sites and tours may be carefully curated to meet traveller's expectations (and prejudices). Increasingly, there is a market for alternative tourism, promising participants access to 'real' people and places, including 'remote villages' and 'slum dwellers'.

Second, goods are designed to suggest uniqueness or individuality. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) suggest that in the service sector, this is demonstrated through the consumer experience. For example, in their study of escorting, Carbonero and Garrido (2018, p.388) identify communicative dimensions which can serve to particularise and

reinforce escort-client relationships. In a similar way, Bernstein (2007, p.483) describes how travel agents may seek to provide tourists with "a sense of distinction, the sense that one is capable of appreciating that which is 'untouched' and accessible to only a few".

While authenticity can be associated with a desire for originality and naturalness, it can also be used to signal identity. Zukin (2008) notes how different groups have claimed authenticity as a moral or intellectual superiority, or a cultural capital. For example, individuals who engage in slum tourism, may do so for reasons of conscience as well as to signal their knowingness and self-distancing from what they perceive as the commodified dissimulation of mainstream tourism. Individuals who pay for girlfriend experiences may see themselves apart from the average parlour punter.

In her 2007 paper entitled 'Sex Work for the Middles Classes', Bernstein introduces the idea of 'bounded authenticity'. This is described as an experience which is positioned as genuine, but delimited. It is delimited most obviously by being paid for, rather than provided for free. But it is also bounded in terms of emotion and time. This may require the seller to engage in the "emotional and physical labour of manufacturing authentic (if fleeting) libidinal and emotional ties with clients, endowing them with a sense of desirablity, esteem or even love" (op cit., p.484). The benefit for the client is that they experience within that paid window the feeling of intimacy and affirmation associated with a relationship, but without the strings. We could also think of bounded authenticity in the context of alternative tourism: those 'genuine' experiences which afford the traveller temporary cultural immersion, yet easy withdrawal.

The desire for authenticity may come at a social cost. Zukin argues that in the context of gentrification, incoming residents may "cleanse and claim space" (Zukin, 2008, p. 745) by supplanting existing commerce, social ties and mores with expensive delis and exclusionary sensibilities. These may be understood as harms of displacement. This paper also considers how the production and consumption of bounded authenticity in sexual services and in alternative tourism can engender social harm, as well as pleasure. However, we recognise that 'social harm' is a contested concept (see for example Pemberton, 2015). Naming such harm can attract accusations of morality, elitism or partisanship. To acknowledge and establish our own position, we turn to Raymen's (2018) useful critique of liberal individualist moral philosophy and its implications for theorising harm.

Drawing on MacIntyre (2011), Raymen notes how the combination of liberal individualism, capitalist rivalry and postmodern rejection of any "adjudicating authority" or "Big Other" (2018, p.8), means that we lack shared criteria on which to resolve moral dilemmas. Neither do we have a coherent basis for defining social harm (op cit., no page ref). If it is freely chosen and pleasurable, then it must be good:

> "[Liberal individualism] has denied the possibility of a fully-functioning Big Other to contradict the late-modern consumer subject and whisper in her ear that particular desire or leisure practice is harmful or illegitimate. Winlow and Hall (2013, p. 157) sum it up nicely: "if nothing is sacred there is nothing that cannot be enjoyed, and nothing that cannot be sold on commercial markets" (Raymen, 2018, no page ref)

Reflecting Hall et al., (2008), Raymen problematises the "private pursuit of consumer pleasures" (op cit., no page ref) which may often depend on the instrumental,

sometimes exploitative, use of others. What is interesting about consuming authenticity, is that this is positioned as both pleasurable *and* ethical. Yet, this judgement is rooted in the subjectivity of the consumer and reinforced by those curating the buying experience.

Taking the lead from Pemberton (2015), Raymen calls for a reconstruction of a shared definition of the Good, which is consistent with human flourishing, although this is not fully defined. Drawing again on McIntyre (2011), Raymen identifies a conducive context for human flourishing as being one where we focus on the internal, rather than external, value of social practices. This is because pursuit of external goods for private benefit can tend to corrode their internal value. To give a concrete example, some may argue that the increasing marketisation of UK higher education has undermined its inherent value as a public good, which has in turn impacted on behaviours, processes and mission within HE institutions.

Focus and approach

The issue we wish to consider then is what are the pleasures, benefits and harms involved in the production and consumption of authenticity, in the sexual services and alternative tourism sectors, each areas of research interest to the authors. Drawing on the available literature, we think about the harms that arise directly within the context where these transactions occur. We also consider whether the private desire to consume 'bounded authenticity', which, paradoxically, may require all involved to engage in artifice, has wider implications for social relations. We anchor this theoretical critique around Raymen (2018) and Pemberton's (2015) work, asking in conclusion whether and how bounded authenticity advances 'human flourishing' (op cit.).

In the following two sections, the authors explore these ideas by focusing on their respective case studies: transactional intimacy and slum tourism. In the final section, we consider the points of connection and, returning to the discussion above, we draw out our key observations on the pleasures, benefits and harms of consuming authenticity.

Case study 1: Transactional intimacy

In this discussion, the term 'transactional intimacy' is used to refer to the exchange of intimacy (including companionship and time, as well as physical/non-physical erotic and sexual acts) for money or other benefit. It could be argued that such transactions have long been a feature of human relationships, as well as within what we understand today as prostitution, sex work or the sex industry. In arranging courtships and marriage, it has been common across cultures and classes to assess a prospective mate's social position, inheritance and financial outlook (Hamon and Ingoldsby, 2003). The rise of modern individualism (and the declining influence of organised religion and familial and community codes of 'honour', for example) has seen courtship and intimacy "move out of the private sphere and into the public sphere of leisure and consumption" (Nayar, 2017, p.337), adding a further interesting twist. It is argued that:

> …[I]ntimate relationships become key to projects of the self, expected to provide emotional, intellectual, and sexual fulfilment. There is a 'deliberative character' to intimacy as a 'functional tool' for managing 'in a world increasingly devoid of social supports' (Santore, 2008, cited in Nayar, 2017, p.337)

Where a relationship does not deliver on all these fronts, a consumerist and individualist mentality can lend contemporary relationships an 'element of disposability' (Brents & Sanders, 2010, cited in Nayar, 2017, p.338).

While the public perception of sex work is of a peremptory and anonymous sexual release for cash, Weitzer (2009, p. 225) notes that affection and attentiveness have traditionally been prized by sex buyers in the indoor market, with many becoming 'regulars'. More recently, this experience has evolved the term 'girlfriend experience' (GFE), with sex workers engaging in kissing and cuddling and creating the impression of unhurried tenderness. This may also involve seeming reciprocity, where the buyer seeks to pleasure the sex worker and ensure her satisfaction. Analysis of escort review sites suggest that sex workers with the highest ratings are those who demonstrate a natural appearance, enjoyment, tenderness and good conversation (Milrod and Monto, 2012; Carbonero and Garrido, 2018).[1]

Weitzer cites Lucas' claim that "For many men, sex is the pretext for the visit, and the real need is emotional" (2005, p.531, in Weitzer, 2009, p. 225). This seems an interesting counter to the patriarchal argument that male sex purchase is about power, and often misogyny (see Bindel, 2016; Barry, 1995), although both arguments may not be mutually exclusive. Sanders (2008) suggests that GFE draws on the template of ordinary heterosexual romance. Reflecting Brents and Hausbeck's (2007) work on the Nevada brothel scene in the United States, Sanders describes a shrewd re-marketing of contemporary sex work:

> …[B]rothel industries […] show signs of moving from a McDonaldisation of standardized production and consumption to an industry that advertises specialise services, upscaling and chic environments where emotional interaction is as much for sale as sexual services. The sex industries, in particular independent female entrepreneurs, recognise that the sex industry is not simply about selling sex acts and sexual fantasies but about the emotional needs of male clients as a commodity market. (Sanders, 2008, pp.412-413).

At the same time as these changes in the 'formal' sex work sector, there are other practices which may have features common to prostitution but not be explicitly recognised as such by the individuals involved. For example, compensated dating originated in Japan in the 1970s (*enjo-kosai*) and is now conspicuous among East Asian teen cultures in Shanghai, Hong Kong and elsewhere (Li et al., 2018, p. 262). 'Sugar daddy' (and 'sugar mommy') relationships in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere, as well 'transactional sex' in Sub-Sahara African and parts of South East Asia, involve the exchange of sex for material benefits, commonly in the context of a relationship. Such arrangements may later become non-transactional relationships (Opperman, 1999).

The common thread through GFE, sugaring and other forms of compensated dating is that participants are engaged in transacting intimacy. They are versions of 'bounded authenticity' but the boundaries can be porous. Women (usually young

[1] While sex work can encompass multiple configurations of gender and sexuality, the literature on transactional intimacy focuses mainly on male buyers and female sellers. 'Boyfriend experiences' also exist in both the straight and gay sex markets (see for example Tewksbury and Lapsey, 2018). However, the research is as yet more limited, so unless otherwise stated, this discussion focuses on the more prevalent pattern of male buyer and female seller.

women) involved in sugaring or compensated dating are unlikely to see themselves as sex workers providing GFE: yet it can be hard in practice to maintain a distinction between a recreational and a relational model of intimacy (Chu and Laidler, 2016, p.60); between commercial sex and more fluid compensated sex. In turn, this can make it difficult to clarify what was agreed to in terms of sexual, physical and emotional intimacy – and what was not. (Equally, it could be argued, this can apply to non-transactional sexual encounters). For 'sugar babies' who feel relatively indifferent to their sugar daddy, maintaining the mutual fiction of authentic intimacy also requires significant emotional labour and 'deep acting' (Hochschild, 1983; Nayar, 2017).

What are the motivations for, and benefits of, seeking to sell or to buy 'authentic' intimacy? Although there will be multiple individual reasons, which may change over time, the available research suggests some recurring themes. In sugaring arrangements, sugar daddies are typically "busy businessmen who lack either the time or the desire to invest emotionally in women" long term (Deeks, 2013, p.255); or, less charitably, it enables rich, aging men to believe they can still charm a 'young lady' (op cit., p.254). In seeking GFE, some men may be in happy but non-intimate marriages, may be widowed or may be seeking companionship and comfort but lack the confidence to pursue non-paid romantic relationships (Milrod and Monto, 2012). Most interestingly, it is argued that seeking to buy *authentic* intimacy is important because "it helps the customer to reject the stigma attached to paying for sex" (Milrod and Monto, 2012, p. 808). Similarly, Chu and Laidler (2016) describe how men who engage in compensated dating do not see themselves as sex buyers but rather:

> …consider themselves as more sophisticated and morally righteous than traditional male clients because their relationships with [those they date] is not only a physical or recreational one, but also an emotional or relational one. (2016, p.62)

This claim links us back to two earlier insights. First, in GFE, the 'mutual fiction' of reciprocal pleasure and enjoyment is important because it enables the client to believe that the sex worker is "at liberty to enjoy herself" (Carbonero and Garrido, 2018, p.393). This in turn enables the buyer to position himself as an equal sexual partner. Second, we noted how transactional intimacy can mean weaker boundaries in terms of what activities are (and are not) within the terms of the contract. In a fascinating analysis of 'gift-for-sex' exchanges in contemporary Russia, Swader and colleagues (2013) argue that there is a qualitative difference between sex traded for money and sex traded for gifts:

> In a society that values finance but stigmatises commercial sex, a 'sponsor' can kiss, exchange sweet nothings with, and romance his 'investment project', but not his 'whore'. (2013, p. 611)

Avoiding 'whore stigma' (Pheterson, 1993) may also be important for young women engaged in sugar dating. In an analysis of a sugar baby community blog, Nayar (2017) notes how sugar babies recognise their instrumental use of intimacy but also "invoke romantic discourses of chemistry, connection, and personal choice" in a way that the author argues helps them to justify sugaring as a "neoliberal strategy for coping with economic and social conditions" (op cit., p.335). It may be conceived in empowerment terms as women capitalising on their "erotic power to achieve their

goals" (op cit., 344), including pursuing a luxury lifestyle: a heady mix of sexuality, consumption and power (Swader et al., 2013; Pardiwalla, 2016).

Deeks (2013) identifies many sugar babies as motivated by financial need (rather than just desires): the BBC, for example, reported in 2016 that that a quarter of a million UK-based students were registered with online site Seeking Arrangements.[2] Although the figure is likely to include multiple duplicate accounts and inactive users, the Swansea University Student Sex Work Project (Sagar et al., 2015), found that around a fifth of students surveyed had considered some form of sex working (excluding sugar dating) with reducing debt, funding studies or lifestyle being key motivators. Others are sexually curious, enjoy being desired (Deeks, 2013) or are looking for flexible ways to earn money which do not require particular work experience or qualifications.

The key individual harms around buying and selling authentic intimacy appear to be in managing boundaries and identities; and the associated physical, emotional or sexual risks. As already identified, the limits can be particularly hard to maintain in sugar dating or compensating dating, as these practices lack the clear contractual nature of sex work. It is a relationship of sorts, requiring displays of intimacy, which may or may not be felt 'authentically' by the seller. This may require some separation between the body, the emotions and one's 'interior world' (Swader et al., 2013), exerting a psychological toll (Deeks, 2013, p.256). For the escort offering GFE also, a significant part of the job becomes devising "strategies to maintain their personal sphere" (Carbonero and Garrido, 2018, p.396), although as earlier work by Brewis and Linstead (2000) demonstrates, sex workers have long practised 'distancing', using humour or relying on family and friends (or for some, alcohol or drugs).[3]A further issue in GFE is where the client or sex worker fall in love (but the feeling is not mutual) or where a client may ask to engage in sex without condoms, as part of the 'authentic' experience (Carbonero and Garrido, 2018, p.391).

Transactional intimacy could be said to offer the social benefit of 'honesty' and 'clarity' (Deeks, 2013). Some have drawn the connection between sexual liberation and commercial sex, arguing that it lays bare the exchange of money for sex which underpins heterosexual marriage and romantic courtship (Prasad, 1999). Of course, this rests on the gendered assumptions that women are sexually indifferent and economically weak. Zelizer (2005) identifies money and economic transfers as simply part of a web of social ties and mutual obligations, negotiated routinely by individuals. Rather than diminishing or corrupting sexuality, Bernstein argues that love and the market continue to interact and provide new forms of interpersonal connection, which are not necessarily more or less 'authentic' than traditional romanticism (2001, pp.398-400).

While these arguments are internally coherent when applying a liberal individualist logic, to understand the potential social harms of transactional intimacy, we need to step back and consider how structural relations of power are sewn through these practices. For example, while compensated dating or being a sugar 'baby' may be

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[2] BBC (2016). 'A quarter of a million' UK students now using sugar daddies, according to app'. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/5aea888a-e70b-4323-b563-b0c01ee18c9e [Accessed at 5 January 2018].

[3] There are arguments made that experience of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) can engender this separation mindset (termed 'disassociation') which, for a small proportion of CSA victims, may facilitate later entry in to sex work. There are likely to be multiple mediating factors, which explains also why the association appears to be stronger among those involved in high risk sex work, such as street work, combined also with drug use (see Lalor and McElvaney, 2010).

experienced individually as transgressive and empowering, and may enable some young women to fund their way to their chosen career, the representation of male and female sexuality; the dominant gendered identities of sugar 'parent' and sugar 'baby'; and the intersection of gender and age with economic status reflect longstanding social inequalities. Women using their erotic capital to advance their interests or to survive is a bounded liberation if their economic status in relation to men changes little. Nayar (2017, pp.344-345) makes the argument too that the discursive distancing of sugaring from sex work can serve to further stigmatise sex workers. This recalls what we term above 'displacement harm', following the example of Zukin's (2008) study of authenticity and gentrification.

In the GFE scene, Milrod and Monto (2012) speculate whether buyers (or 'hobbyists', as they are termed) come to believe that all sex workers are essentially "concupiscent GFE" (op cit., p. 807), when many sex workers are working in far more straitened and perfunctory – sometimes coerced - contexts. In a similar way, Nayar (2017) cites Berg's (2013) argument that some sex worker activist discourse can:

> "…[romanticise] ideas about what sex work means to women who are privileged enough to narrate it free from need for economic resources and a product of 'unencumbered choice' (Nayar, 2017, p. 339).

While this discussion has deliberately omitted discussion of GFE *tourism* (to avoid conceptual muddying with the second case study), a number of writers in this area argue that sex tourists often attribute the GFE experience as a feature of all 'local women' (this can apply to female sex tourists too who engage in temporary relationships with local men). The buyer imagines that attentiveness, affection and sexuality are an authentic racial or cultural trait (O'Connell-Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1999; Gezinski et al., 2016). In summary, practices of transactional intimacy too often reflect and re-enforce structural inequalities of economics, age, gender and ethnicity.

Internationally, sugar dating does not receive specific regulatory attention. Host sites are allowing individuals to connect for companionship, rather than sex, so do not fall foul of pimping laws. Compensated dating is generally socially disapproved of in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea and policed where it is effectively prostitution or involves those under age, but narratives of empowerment exist too (Ueno, 2003). The direct buying and selling of sex in England and Wales is not illegal, as long as the participants are both aged over 18, but it is an offence to pay for sex where the 'seller' is forced by a third party. Sex workers providing GFE cannot work together out of premises (as this would constitute a brothel), which can compromise their safety, although the nature of the GFE service means that a brothel set up in is any case less likely. As the discussion above suggests, tinkering with prostitution laws may not meaningfully address the inequalities which transactional intimacy can in some contexts reflect and reinforce. Economic equality, particularly between men and women, but also between international and sub-national regions, and through intersections of ethnicity, disability, sexuality or age, appears to be key to ensuring that engaging transactional intimacy provides mutual benefit, rather than asymmetrical harm.

Case Study 2: Slum Tourism

This second case study focuses on 'slum' tourism, an example of 'alternative tourism' that is inherently associated with notions of poverty. Recent years have witnessed a huge growth in attention to alternative tourism, as tourists search for a more meaningful leisure experience. As will be explored, there are overlapping issues with volunteer tourism[4] and also dark tourism.[5]In common with each of these fields of tourism studies, debates remain about an 'exploitative and voyeuristic' leisure practice, versus, a more 'pro-social form of ethical consumption' (see Raymen, 2017). For its advocates, slum tourism is positioned as economically advantageous and as empowering, rather than othering or exploitative. Drawing in part on Bernstein's idea of bounded authenticity (2007), this section explores the nexus of harm and benefit in relation to slum tourism.

Slum tourism has been described by non-governmental organisation *Tourism Concern* as a leisure practice that 'involves touring marginalised and impoverished areas that tourists would never normally visit' (Monroe and Bishop, 2016, p.1). From the outset, it is important to recognise the scale of slum tourism. As noted by Meschkank (2011, p.48) "slum tourism is not simply a matter of a few backpackers […] it denotes a profoundly organised branch of tourism". Although the use of the term 'slum' is considered by some as problematic (see Gilbert, 2007); the term is general discourse within sustainable development policy, and within the academic field of tourism studies. In describing a slum, the United Nations highlight the insecure status of residents, having no legal right to their dwelling. Further, "slums are acknowledged to be characterised by inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, poorly built housing and overcrowding" (United Nations, 2016 cited in Nisbett, 2017, p.37).

Concerns about sustainability and authenticity have positioned 'mass tourism' – or traditional ideas around the tourist experience - as both socially irresponsible and inauthentic (Harrison and Sharpley, 2017; Mowforth and Munt, 2016). This in part relates to the increasingly diverse opportunity for tourism experiences, and in particular the development of what has been described as 'alternative tourism'. This is described by Wearing (2001) as something that:

> …[r]ebukes mass tourism and the consumptive mindset it engenders and instead offers alternative, more discriminating, socially and environmentally sustaining tourist experiences (cited in Lyons and Wearing, 2008, p.3)

Throughout the tourist experience, the importance of personal narratives, or stories, is considered as central to understanding tourist motivations. Alternative tourism, often associated with notions such as real, adventure and authentic, is said to provide a more *real,* and further, less *commodified* experience. Debates within the literature recognise the positioning of the tourist experience as both a way to *escape* routine life (see Larsen, 2008) and their role in identity construction (Rojek, 2005). Regardless of the success of tourism to provide either in terms of actuality, the subjective interpretation and meanings of these for the individual tourist (or more accurately, consumer), is important when exploring motivations. As with other forms of alternative tourism, the desire to position oneself away from the 'mass' tourist, to the

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[4] Broadly, volunteer tourism can be defined as "volunteering in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001, p.1).

[5] 'Dark tourism' involves travelling to places associated historically with death or tragedy (Foley and Lennon, 1996).

point of often rejecting the label of tourist (see Barrett, 1990; Butcher, 2003; Mowforth and Munt, 2016), is evident within the narratives of those partaking in slum tours.

Research on slum tourism suggests a central motivation for visiting a slum is the quest for an unmediated sense of 'reality', albeit it is suggested this is more about comparing *images* of reality with those known from the media (Meschkank, 2011). It is recognised that this will mean different things for different individuals, depending on their experience and perceptions (Wang, 1999; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Belhassen et al., 2008). Further, Belhassen and colleagues (2008) argue that authenticity needs to be understood not just for its subjective nature, but how this interacts with place and socio-spatial relations. Meschkank (2011, p.51) suggests that data on slum tourists motivations provides a 'clear differentiation between real and authentic experiences'. Given the extent of the research findings that highlight the search for the 'real' in slum tourist motivations (Freire-Medeiros, 2009; Meschkank, 2011; Dyson, 2012; Jones & Sanyal, 2015; Nisbett, 2017; Schuckmann & Barros, 2018), regardless of the epistemological and ontological issues that problematise what 'real' can mean, given multiple subjectivities, tourist narratives suggests that this is something that they value from these experiences. This search for the 'real' is common with many other forms of alternative tourism (see for example Large & Schilar, 2018) and is evident in the marketing messages of tour providers and operators.

In addition to wanting to experience the 'real', alternative tourism is associated with concern for a tourist experience that is more *responsible*. Pro-social media, charitable advertising and corporate social responsibility statements encourage us also to consider consuming leisure more *ethically.* As well as reflecting the drive to continually diversify and expand tourist experiences, to stave off competition, this responds to critique of mass tourism, which it is claimed ignores the views of locals (Lyons & Wearing, 2008) and creates social and environmental harms (Butcher, 2003). Further, there is a desire for more *individualised* travel (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). In alternative tourist experiences, tourists on the one hand want to engage (or even *enjoy*) the spectacle of seeing the real – as in Bernstein's (2007) analysis, they want a responsible emotional and physical experience – but they also want to experience to be time-limited.

Much of the slum tourism literature reveals a dichotomy of views; pitching tours as either empowering or exploitative, this critique overlaps with common media and public narratives which are argued to be positioned on personal judgements about ethics, and dualisms of voyeuristic or non-voyeuristic (see Dyson, 2012). It is unclear to what extent it is useful to consider the issue in such a way given the potential differences between tours in terms of context and scale and the inevitably differential (and changing) impacts on groups or individuals. The approach here therefore is to review the potential for benefits and harms, in relation to economic issues, social-cultural issues and socio-political issues.

Those who highlight the benefits of slum tours – and more generally of overlapping forms of charity, poverty, and even dark or disaster tourism – tend to point out their benefit to local economies (see Frenzel, 2014; Monroe & Bishop, 2016). First, there is the potential for donations to be made to the communities visited by the tourists or tour companies/guides. Second, slum tours may create jobs for local guides and the potential for businesses in the form of tour companies. Indeed, it could be argued that without slum tourism interactions, residents would be even worse off financially – even if they do not see all of the income. These financial benefits are considered as key, and largely support much of the economic policy rationale for

encouraging tourism. However, this economic rationale is not always shared at national government level. There have been concerns that slum tourism can have a negative impact on the image of the host country, and thus present a risk for national tourism strategies – although Nisbett (2017) suggests there is no evidence to support this claim.

Closely caught up within the notions of a more *authentic* experience, slum tours are considered a powerful way to educate tourists about 'realities' which contrast their own comfortable existence. At the same time, the tours may challenge the representations of slums and poverty perpetuated by the media (Meschkank, 2011; Frenzel, 2014; Bishop & Monroe, 2016) as desperate places with (deservingly?) desperate people. However, it is not clear that slum tourism does genuinely provoke any meaningful change in how slum residents are perceived (Dyson, 2012; Nisbett, 2017). It may indeed serve to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes, as well as represent an exploitative breach of privacy (see Bishop & Monroe, 2016).

Other perceived benefits relate to the socio-political gains which previously marginalised and powerless communities can achieve through growing economic leverage and the increased visibility of their community. The idea is that increasing wealth and increasing tourist footfall will bring with it opportunities for political participation and voice (Bishop & Monroe, 2016). At the other end of the scale, it is argued that the potential for voyeuristic tourists to come and stare at the poor, can be hugely damaging (Bishop & Monroe, 2016). Whilst recognising Steinbrink's (2012) critique that reducing tourist motivations simply to voyeuristic thrill-seeking is problematic, there is evidence in some tourist narratives that slum tours enable a rationalisation of poverty and the conditions of slum residents (see Nisbett, 2017). For example, Nisbett (2017, p.40) examines that Dharavri slum (in Mumbai, India) where, it is argued, the tour's emphasis on the economic and business success of industries within the slum, and the representation of working there as a 'lifestyle choice', glosses over the many exploitative and dangerous labour practices. Nisbett questions the likelihood of genuine pressure for change arising from tourists visiting these areas:

> Tour operators and tourists jointly construct a view of poverty that is normalized, even romanticized. It is seen as neutral and benign, rather than something deadly, which diminishes wellbeing and threatens life. Poverty is depoliticized. Visitors leave the slum feeling happy and satisfied to have witnessed the 'real' and 'authentic' India, but the potential for development is hindered as residents are left with little prospect of change. (Nisbett, 2017, p.37).

Space does not permit a more detailed analysis of all the potential harms associated with slum tourism, some of which will apply to tourism more generally (such as environmental harms, worker exploitation, and so on). However, the question of *who* benefits or gains pleasure (and to what harm) from a slum tour is relevant to this discussion. Common to many attempts to reduce the harm associated with consumption of both material goods and experiences is to encourage consumers –in this case tourists – to consume ethically and responsibly (see Brisman and South, 2014). Non-governmental organisation *Tourism Concern* provide a fitting example of this kind of harm-reduction, individual consumer responsibility approach. Having outlined the pros and cons of slum tourism, they advocate a list of guiding points that consumers should reflect on if they want to take part. These include: Why are you going? Is the marketing material appropriate? Do guides receive fair salaries? Or Photography policies (see Monroe & Bishop, 2016).

The key issue here relates to the expansion and diversification of a destination's tourism offer as an initiative for driving economic success or creating or stabilising economies. Successful tourist experiences will mean growing visitor numbers, which will in turn lead to the expansion of tour operators, typically with a more commercialised ethos (Giddy and Hidgendoorn, 2018). This can mean that any initial positive intentions and benefits (or local controls) might be lost or displaced (Rolfes, Steinbrink and Uhl, 2010). Other than the direct or indirect financial benefits, which will vary depending on the tour set-up, it is not clear how beneficial such tourism can be for the majority of those living in slum communities. We could argue that the pleasures of the experience are primarily experienced by the consumers.

However, even for the consumer, the educative, social justice and transformative benefits – once personal gratification is set aside – are questionable. This is because slums and poverty will often be problematically contexualised within the individual's subjective 'real' and as Dyson (2012, p271) suggests through a communicated 'idealized reality'. It may, for example, confirm the individual's prejudices that poverty is deserving or that slum residents are 'actually quite resourceful and happy'. And in the event (infrequent, given the evidence in research studies of tourists' narratives) of a transformative impact on tourists' perceptions of poverty and inequalities, there is little evidence to suggest subsequent substantive benefits for slum residents (as per Nisbett, 2017, above), i.e. a virtuous circle.

Such tours are just one of a panoply of experiences marketed to meet contemporary consumer desires. Tourists on slum tours are not consuming authenticity, but a representation of authenticity. When it all gets 'too real', tourists can go home, or back to their hot shower and comfortable bed at the hotel. However, they can go back having experienced *risk.* The subjective nature of risk – along with authenticity can also be encapsulated within a sense of tourist *adventure.* This is not to berate individual tourists' who may believe that they are engaging with a pro-social and ethical behaviour, but rather to highlight the broader harm that arises from a misguided sense of possibility for this kind of experience to be much more than a lightly educative (at best) leisure encounter. Within the context of global inequality, few will benefit substantially from slum tourism – perhaps not even the consumer, beyond the pleasure of the bounded experience.

Conclusions

In this final section, we identify some points of connection between the two case studies, before returning to Raymen (2018) to assess the harms of bounded authenticity, in terms of instrumental use and human flourishing (also Pemberton, 2015).

First, both case studies identified that 'consuming authenticity' is positioned as somehow morally or ethically superior. This can be both a public signal or a private rationalisation. In case study 1, we noted that individuals engaged in transactional intimacy may use authenticity to distinguish themselves from 'sex workers', with the implication that 'sex work' is a derogatory term. Second, and relatedly, we noted how consuming authenticity can produce displaced harms. In the previous example, the effect of claiming that sugaring or compensated dating are more genuine because they include a strong relational element, is by implication to further stigmatise sex workers. In the case of slum tourism, we noted that tourists may miss the structural factors behind poverty and instead ascribe individualistic or 'cultural' factors, which they may in turn apply to disadvantaged groups on returning to their home country. In

addition, national and regional governments may feel that they are absolved their responsibility for slum residents as private enterprise and private donations take their place. In this way, the transactional exchange of (in)authenticity may have a harmful effect on human relationships and on collectivist action. Third, we noted that arguments supporting consuming authenticity tend to draw on a liberal individualist and economic rationale. Supporters embrace, or at least accept, the role of money, the market or neoliberalism in all spheres of life and they focus on the productive or transformative potential of these intersections. In both case studies, the role of structural inequalities can be either under-discussed or under-problematised.

In the opening review, we identified two of Raymen's (2018) claims in particular. First, he argued that the pursuit of external goods for private benefit can tend to corrode their internal value. In terms of case study 1, is there a risk of "market logic… spill-over" (Swader et al., 2013, p.600) from transactional to non-transactional intimate relationships? In some ways, Zelizer (2005) and Bernstein (2001) suggest that this is the wrong question, because it relies on the 'hostile worlds' view that intimacy and markets are mutually exclusive. It also suggests that conventional romanticism is authentic, and devoid of monetary concern. These writers would likely caution that disapproval of transactional intimacy is often rooted in old-fashioned beliefs about sex and the sanctity of monogamous relationships. In case study 2, it could be argued that the commercial expansion of 'slum tourism', given its perceived economic benefits, makes the educative or transformational potential of such experiences even more remote. There is also a perverse logic that too much economic revival in the fortunes of slum dwellers will undermine the *raison d'être* of the tours. Like the orphanages who keep the philanthropic funding flowing by filling their beds with non-orphans,[1] some slums may need to be preserved in aspic for the authentic experience-hunting poverty tourist. Yet supporters of slum tourism will point to their economic benefits and position critics as sneering idealists, removed from realities on the ground. Raymen anticipates such disputes when he refers to the absence in postmodern liberal-individualist society of a commonly-held narrative on what constitutes 'good'. This has both liberated us from dogma but left us each steering inconsistently by our own moral compass.

Second, and drawing on Pemberton (2015), Raymen (2018) proposes that we evaluate social practices by their capacity for advancing human flourishing. On one level, the expansion of opportunities for transactional intimacy can be seen as liberating individual choice; freeing us from old-fashioned concerns about sexual morality and pleasure; and ethical in that (even feigned) intimacy seems to indicate consent and respect. Yet the neo-liberal framing of freedom as choice, and in turn as choice to consume (Baumann, 2001), is not surely the same as 'flourishing'. Flourishing implies the ability to thrive in all aspects of personhood (emotional intellectual, spiritual, physical, relational and so on: albeit some level of economic prosperity may be needed to enable those) and in community with others. As this discussion shows, practices of transactional intimacy too often reflect and re-enforce structural inequalities of economics, age, gender and ethnicity. In a similar way, while slum tourism could be understood as a mechanism of social and economic transformation, the available literature suggests that the benefit and pleasure accrues mainly to the consumer, and even here, this may be limited in time and emotional effect. Human flourishing in such a scenario is asymmetric and short-lived.

In summary, we have tried to demonstrate in this paper the equivocal impact of the desire to consume bounded authenticity. From a liberal individualist and economic

perspective, it is possible that buyers and sellers can gain mutual benefit. There are also opportunities for individuals to subvert power structures within authenticity markets. Yet given the inequalities that run through contemporary consumption practices, too often the economic and social autonomy of the buyer attest only to the economic and social constraints of the seller. Polyani (1957, cited in Sandbrook, 2000) noted that while market exchange has existed throughout history, "a market system, in which everyone satisfies his/her material needs by treating land, labour and money [and, we might add, *people*] as commodities, is an invention of the past three centuries". (op cit., 1075). Instead, reciprocity and redistribution characterised many earlier economic systems: practices which arguably embody and inculcate rather different cultural logics to neo-liberalism. Indeed, on the question of cultural impact, we ask whether the boundaries erected around the trade in 'authentic' experiences may over time dissolve, changing perceptions, values and interactions across social life. Finally, we note the ostensibly noble motives in seeking to purchase authentic experiences yet problematise the use of the market as a normative framework for assessing the 'good' and for defining 'human flourishing'. We conclude that the moral veneer of consuming authenticity too often belies the reproduction and displacement of existing inequalities.

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